

TEACHERS' PREFERENCE IN ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEACHING AND LEARNING IN SOKOTO STATE

AISHA ABDULLAH IBRAHIM¹ & GOODLUCK C. KADIRI²

¹Department of Curriculum Studies and Education, Usmanu Danfodiyo University, Sokoto, Nigeria

²Use of English Unit, School of General Studies, University of Nigeria, Nsukka, Nigeria

ABSTRACT

This paper examines teachers' preference in the English language teaching and learning in Sokoto State. The study identified preference to be a construct that has high correlation with one's response to a stimulus on the basis of choice and the factors that necessitated the choice. In order to establish the nature of preference, this paper explores the concept of preference and the reasons for preference. Furthermore, a five-item questionnaire was constructed by the authors and was administered to fifty (50) teachers of English language in Sokoto State so as to view their perception towards the reasons for preference. The findings of this study indicate that preferences exist in the teaching and learning of the English language. Lack of competence, fear of some topics by learners, lack of materials among others could be the reasons for preference. As a result, this study suggested that all the necessary conditions should be met so as to maximize preference for all the topics and components of the English language curriculum.

KEYWORDS: Teachers, Preference, English Language, Teaching, Learning

INTRODUCTION

It would be very difficult for one to dispute the importance of the teaching and learning of English language in the Nigerian context. This is sequel to the enviable and invaluable position it is occupying in the educational and other official domains of the country. It is in view of this that it was recognized and accorded a prestigious position in the curricula of the various levels of study in the formal education sector of Nigeria. As a result, English language is not only a medium of instruction for other school subjects but a course of study in its own right. This, therefore, has made the development of English language curricula for the primary and post-primary levels compulsory. These curricula are divided into components of which the teachers of English are expected to teach various learning units. The learners, on their own part, having understood the nature of the curriculum also select those skills they would like to study based on their learning styles during the course of personal studies.

However, the existence of several English language skills (which could be stated as interrelated) in the curricula have given the teachers and learners the opportunity of making choices pertaining what to teach or what to learn. This has eventually brought about the salient issue of preference in the teaching and learning of English language in Nigeria. Preference as a construct could entail the process of making choices or decisions on an object or idea. The choices must however be necessitated by some considerable factors. In consequence therefore, the teacher or learner of English language could make choices about the topics or skills to be taught or learnt during the course of time or at a particular period. This choice is guided by the principle of freedom.

Having identified that freedom could be a force for choice, and decision making, freedom could be delimited depending on the individuals involved and the context (Ndubisi, 2001)¹. Whatever the cause of a preference, it could be good or bad. In this vein, the knowledge of the attributes of a preference may not likely be within the consciousness of the individual that made the preference. This could, be so where there is no guiding force or the insight for the realization of the consequences of the preference.

Dundame (1994)² has observed that preference has a high correlation with ones cognitive and affective dispositions as well as ones physical abilities. It is in the light of these that teachers and learners of English language do make choices on what to teach or learn based on the nature of the programme, the deep interest they have for the subject area and their overall abilities. These preferences are made sometime in complete negligence of the provisions in the curriculum thus jeopardizing the realization of the general aims and objectives of English language teaching and learning. It is in view of the background presented above that this paper was designed to look at the nature and causes of preference in English language teaching and learning. This study also sourced the opinions of individuals on the causes of preference in "English language teaching and learning. Furthermore, the paper states the implication of preference on English language education and made some suggestions.

The Nature of Preference

A non-contextual definition of the word preference could make it sound nebulous. This is because the term could mean a process or factor that necessitates a choice and the result of such a choice. Preference is a mental or sensory reaction that is targeted towards a particular stimulus. Thus, preferences are usually prompted by such psychological phenomena like needs, values, priorities, innate abilities, socio-cultural forces and previous experiences (Mukherjee, 2002)³. Thus, potential, assumed or resultant effect of a particular stimulus on individual could determine whether a person would express positive or negative preference to the stimulus. Once the foreseen effect is negative, the feeling towards the stimulus becomes weak hence the need for the stimulus to be jettisoned. However, where the expected effect is positive, the preference for the stimulus is strong (Mukherjee, 2002)⁴.

Having identified that the preference for a particular stimulus could be weak or strong, it would be very imperative to mention that preference is not static. It is subject to metamorphosis. Inconsistency in preference is more ubiquitous among people who are not conscious of their preferences. As a result, such people need constant guidance and sensitizations so as to enable them identify their preferences to the level of consciousness. Contrastively, there are some people who are extremely conscious of their preferences. This could be to the level of deep-footedness. Sometimes the preference may not necessarily be productive. Consequently, changing the preferences of such people is always a herculean task, especially where superficial persuasion is adopted by the change agent. In view of this, experience and the consequences of holding to such preferences are the factors that could consolidate or change such type of preferences.

The Reasons for Preference

Having explained the nature of preference, it is pertinent to examine the reasons for preference in English language teaching and learning. It should be borne in mind that the reasons for preference are inexhaustible and could vary depending on the individuals or group of individuals involved.

According to Mukherjee (2002)⁵ "*the set of feelings and cognition about oneself can be termed as one's self or self-concept*". Hence, the feeling one has about one's self, especially about one's level of cognition or dexterity in English language, could serve as a factor that would lead to preference which pertains to the topics of English language that one would teach or learn. For instance, there are some individuals who are of the feeling that they cannot be good models when it comes to teaching spoken English. In consequence and in order to "save their faces" they prefer not teaching spoken English to the learners. In the same vein, some learners have personally appraised themselves and identified that they cannot memorize language contents. As a result, such students avoid embarking on the study of poetry and exercises that have to do with linguistic or structural competence.

Another reason for the preference of teaching or learning a particular content area over another has to do with the needs and aspirations of the learners. These would make the teacher to modify the entire teaching process by the means of selecting those contents that he or she feels the learners so desire (Nwachukwu, 1986)⁶. Thus, the negative attitude of the learners towards a particular component of the English curriculum could dissuade the teacher from teaching such component. For instance, some learners regard studying grammar as rigorous (McArthur, 1996). As a result, a teacher who could be influenced by the learners may decide not to teach such components.

William (2000)⁷ identified the size of the class, textbooks and other basic materials as some of the factors that could facilitate the choice and teaching of a topic in the English language course. Inadequate textbooks or reading materials in their actual or improvised forms could hamper the teachers' zeal for the teaching of the English language reading skills. This will in turn make the teacher prefer other components that could be taught even without adequate materials.

The materials might be available but lack of proficiency in teaching a particular content area in the English language course could be responsible for the teachers' preference in the teaching of some content areas. In consequence, the teacher would prefer teaching those areas he or she thinks he or she would feel more comfortable teaching. Azikiwe (1998)⁸ posited that the success of a teacher of English and the rate at which he or she would prefer teaching components of the English language course depends on his or her cognitive disposition in English studies as well as his or her familiarity with current knowledge in the theories and practices of teaching and learning English language. The higher the scope of one's cognition in the entire course the higher the affective disposition and preferences one would exhibit in the teaching of the components.

The scope of one's understanding of the language course would depend on one's exposure to the course during one's teacher education programme. It is quite evident that there are disparities in the curricula of respective universities, especially as they relate to English studies. The fact that some courses are elective in one university but compulsory in the other would contribute towards creating disparities in the scope of knowledge in the course. This situation had eventually produced teachers that lack basic knowledge of some salient aspects of the English language course. Thus, such teachers that have no understanding of those areas would prefer not to teach those areas they have no exposure in.

External examinations have also contributed to the preference of some areas over others when it comes to the teaching and learning of English language. It has been observed that some teachers prefer using past examination question papers as the compass for teaching English language rather than sticking to the approved curriculum (Mohammed, 1995⁹; Balarabe, 2006)¹⁰. This has made some important topics that can groom the learners for day-to-day language use to be neglected. As a result, candidates are only prepared for examinations and not actual everyday language use.

METHODOLOGY

The data in the Table below were collected after some fifty (50) copies of questionnaire were administered to fifty (50) teachers of English language selected proportionately from twenty schools in Sokoto State. The self-constructed questionnaire had five items that were presented in declarative form of which the respondents were to respond by agreeing to the statement or disagreeing. All the respondents responded to each of the items pertaining to reasons for preference in the teaching and learning of English language.

RESULTS

The results in the Table below indicated that some factors are indeed responsible for preference in the teaching and learning of English language. The results suggest that there are reasons for preference in the teaching and learning of English language.

Table 1: Teachers of English Perception: Preference in the Teaching and Learning of English Language

S. No	Items	A	D	Total
1	Teachers prefer teaching topics they have confidence and competence in	48	2	50
2	Teachers prefer not teaching the courses students have apathy for	29	21	50
3	Inadequate materials could bring preference	32	18	50
4	Lack of teaching method could make a teacher not teach some topics	16	24	50
5	The courses studied at the teacher education level could lead to preference	43	7	50
Total		168	82	250

Where A= Agree D= Disagree

DISCUSSIONS

From the data collected in this study, it could be stated that the teachers of English quite agree with the position of Balarabe (2006) and Mohammed (1995) on the reasons for preference in the teaching and learning of English language. An overwhelming 96% of the respondents agreed that teachers of English would prefer those topics they have cognitive confidence and competence in. This means that such teachers would not like to teach the topics they lack dexterity in. Of interest is that only twenty-nine (29) respondents out of the fifty (50) respondents agreed that one of the reasons why teachers prefer teaching some topics over others is due to the students' lack of interest in less preferred topics. That twenty-one (21) respondents did not agree to such indicates that there are some teachers who would still stick to the recommended syllabus whether students like the topics therein or not.

In addition to the two reasons above, 64% of the respondents agreed that teachers of English may decide to teach some topics where the necessary materials that would facilitate the teaching of those topics are not readily available. However, only sixteen (16) out of the fifty (50) respondents agreed that teachers prefer teaching topics that they have the methods of teaching. To the respondents therefore, lack of methods is not a strong reason for preference. However, how can one teach what one does not know how to teach? In view of this, lack of method can make teacher prefer the topics he or she can teach over those he or she cannot teach. This is in agreement with Azikiwe (1998) and Dundame (1994).

Finally, the respondents in their majority (86%) agreed that what you learned during your teacher education programme could influence your preference for some topics. Here, a teacher of English who has a shallow knowledge of

literature during his or her teacher training programme may prefer not to teach literature.

Implications for Curriculum Development and Language Education

The implication of the nature and reasons for preference in the teaching and learning of English language for curriculum development and language education could be negative or positive.

The implication could be positive because a survey of those areas that teachers and learners of English have high preference for would reveal the needs and aspirations of the subjects thus providing direction for the development of the English language curriculum that is based on needs analysis.

In addition, the preference of some topics over others by teachers may help the teachers in specialization. Furthermore, the teaching of those areas that teachers prefer would make the teachers and learners enthusiastically engaged and active in the study.

However, the nature of preference could affect the implementation of a broad curriculum thus, affecting the learner's chances of success in national or statewide examinations that require broad-based knowledge.

In addition, extreme preference for some topics and phobia for others could make a learner deficient in communicative proficiency. This would affect the learner's ability to cope with day-to-day communicative interactions.

Preference for some topics over others could breed the memorization of those topics less preferred by the learners. And where the teacher is the one that has low preference for the topic, the teacher may likely not provide the best even where the learners are interested in the topic.

CONCLUSIONS

This study has exposed the reasons for preference in English language teaching and learning. The paper submits that lack of competence, fear of some topics by learners, lack of materials and the training the teacher of English received during the course of teacher education programme could be the reasons for preference'. In addition, the nature and reasons for preference in the teaching and learning of English language can affect curriculum development and language education positively or negatively. The work recommended that motivation, training and monitoring should be intensified so as to breed positive and all round preferences in the teaching and learning of English language.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The following are recommendations in the light of the findings of this study:

- Motivation strategies should be embarked upon by teachers and psycholinguists so as to prompt the development of preference for those topics that hitherto have less or no preference from teachers and learners.
- There should be high uniformity in the curricula of English/Education all over the country. The curriculum should be very broad covering English language, literature and language education.
- Team teaching, on the basis of preference and specialization, should be intensified for now. This will give the lepers the opportunity of accessing all aspects of the English language curriculum.
- Where preference is as a result of deficiency in teacher development programme, on-the-job training should be

emphasized. This will make the deficient teachers be abreast with the substances of the areas they lack competence in. This will in the end enhance proficiency.

- Teaching/reading materials should be provided for all the levels of education.

REFERENCES

1. Ndubuisi, F. (2001). The Theory of Human Nature. In Godwin Azenabor (ed.). *Philosophical Psychology Selected Readings*. Ikeja: Malthouse Press Limited. Pp. 74 - 85.
2. Dundame, O. (1994). Level of Describing Language. In Olu Obafemi (ed.) *New Introduction to English Language*. Ibadan: Y-Books. Pp. 31-48. Me Arthur, T. (ed). (1996). *The Oxford Companion to the English Language*: Abridged Edition. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
3. Mukherjee, A. (2002). Educational Psychology: 5th Edition. Zaria: S, A. Sekome and Co Publishers.
4. Ibid. p.2.
5. Ibid. p.3.
6. Nwachukwu, V. O. O. (1980). Factors affecting the learning process. In Nwachukwu Y. O. O. (Ed) *Educational Psychology*. (PP. 63 - 69). Ibadan. Heinemann Educational Book (Mg) Limited.
7. William, D. (2000). *English Language Teaching: An Integrated Approach*. Ibadan: Spectrum Books Limited.
8. Azikiwe, U. (1998). *Language Teaching and Learning*. Onitsha: African-Fep Publishers Limited.
9. Mohammed, A. (1995). Communicative Competence Acquisition in Infelicitous Learning Environments: The Problem with SSS English in Nigeria. In Ayo Bamgbose, Ayo, B. and Andrew, I. (eds). *New English's: A West African Perspective*. Ibadan: Mosuto Publishers PP. 130 -152.
10. Balarabe, M. (2006). Assessment Generated Constraints to Instructions and Learning in Nigerian School System Implications for Life Long.
11. Learning and Productivity. *Sokoto Educational Review*. Vol. 8: 1 April, 2006. Pp 39 - 48.